

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 857

JC 790 391

AUTHOR Wells, Richard T.
 TITLE A Program for the Blind at Randolph Technical College.
 PUB DATE [79]
 NOTE 12p.
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Adult Education Programs; Blind; *Braille; *Communication Skills; Community Colleges; *Daily Living Skills; *Junior Colleges; Program Development; *Special Education; Travel Training; *Visually Handicapped; Visually Handicapped Mobility
 IDENTIFIERS Randolph Technical College NC

ABSTRACT

Randolph Technical College (RTC) and the Division of Services for the Blind of the North Carolina Department of Human Resources have cooperated for two years on a program to provide blind students with the opportunity to receive instruction in a traditional classroom setting on a college campus. Problems encountered in the early stages of the program, before and immediately after it was instituted at RTC, included: difficulties in administrative coordination, the financial burden, securing a classroom and transportation, and recruiting students and staff. Through the efforts of Randolph's Learning Resources Center, the Office of Continuing Education, and other campus departments, instruction is provided to 16 legally blind students by four Braille instructors and one aide. One morning a week, classes are offered in Braille, and Communication Awareness, which includes vocabulary, listening skills, and public speaking. Special learning units cover the metric system; manual dexterity through rug-making; daily nutrition, including shopping and actual meal preparation; and mobility training. Since many of these blind students live alone on limited incomes, programs are designed to help them become self-sufficient. Instruction is supplemented by numerous field trips with the financial assistance of local community organizations. The ultimate goal of the program is to fully integrate blind students into Randolph's Continuing Education Program. (DR)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED172857

A PROGRAM FOR THE BLIND AT RANDOLPH TECHNICAL COLLEGE

By

Richard T. Wells

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard T. Wells

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

JC 790 391

A Program for the Blind at Randolph Technical College

Randolph Technical College and the North Carolina Department of Human Resources, Division of Services for the Blind have been cooperating upon a special program for the blind for almost two years now.

The Division of Services for the Blind have in the past relied upon a tutor method of teaching Braille to blind clients by having a Braille instructor visit the students at their home. The program in operation here was conceived as an experiment, and continues to be observed with many questions and an occasional raised eyebrow.

It is only now, deep into our second year that I feel confident enough about the stability of the program to openly boast about its success. Do not raise your eyebrow. I will share some not so successful points also.

Origin

The program began at the Asheboro Public Library. It was a joint venture sponsored by the Library, the Division of Services for the Blind, and the local YMCA. These three very diverse agencies had something besides competing for revenue in common: Visually impaired adults who needed special attention. The tutor method of teaching Braille was expensive, time consuming, and generally out dated.

The original idea of a classroom setting on an experimental basis was propositioned by the Division of Services for the Blind. The Asheboro Public Library Extension Department, through providing library services to a great deal of Randolph County's homebound, already possessed the expertise in working with those with a major impairment. The library also

had the space for such a classroom in the form of a community meeting room. The YMCA would provide instructors in exercise and physical mobility skills for the blind. The Division of Services for the Blind would provide what finances would be needed for transportation, instruction supplies, salaries, etc.

Early Problems

I will not insult your intelligence by recounting the many administrative and bureaucratic entanglements that evolve when two or more public agencies embark upon a project.

They were not insurmountable, however, as the program did get off the ground. It was discovered that the visually impaired could learn Braille easier in a classroom setting. It was also found that bringing this unique group together tended to strengthen each individual. They found the comradeship that many had so sorely lacked before.

The excellent instruction in communication and audio awareness provided by the library's Extension Department awakened many of the students to resources of enlightenment they had previously been unaware existed.

However, the cooperation of the three agencies became more difficult to manage. The YMCA completed its commitment, but the class continued for another six month session concentrating on Braille and communication. The problems of administration became tiresome. The social worker's caseload only allowed her so much time to handle such a responsibility, and the public library's Extension Department was already understaffed.

I did not aid matters any by resigning my position as an Extension Department librarian and joining the staff at Randolph Technical College

as a librarian. The present term of the program had expired, so everyone was given an extended summer vacation.

"A Sterile Academic Setting"

It was through the foresight and eagerness of the Learning Resources Center (LRC) Director at the time, (Summer, 1976), that we proposed to reinstitute the program on the Randolph Technical College campus. The facilities were more atoned to class offerings, the contractual details could be readily handled by the College's business office, and I, 'presumptuously, had the experience to administer this show. Furthermore, making educational services readily available to the handicapped was, as it is today, a major new concern for public funded institutions.

The opposition to having the program here was at first discouraging. Some that had been involved before were fearful of the sterile academic setting a post secondary institution would project. I still find this humorous. Administrators voiced concern over financial responsibility, supplies, staff time, and all the other metaphysical ponderings administrators must worry over.

Nevertheless, we managed to begin the program anew. We had a bona fide contract from the North Carolina Department of Human Resources, Division of Services for the Blind, stating that they would reimburse RTC on the basis of per student per hour of instruction. They would also provide the many services of the local and regional social workers: This included student referrals, instructor referrals, etc. RTC was to provide classroom facilities, business affairs coverage, and administration. The contract now in effect, like the first, covers the July-June fiscal year, with the Institute billing the Department of Human Resources

quarterly for reimbursement.

Once we had the contract in hand, my ambitious and resourceful LRC Director dropped the ball in my hands. It was then I began gathering the diplomacy and expertise required to become an effective administrator. One delegates responsibility to dependable persons until all he has to do is be responsible for more delegation.

I had a contract, a beginning date, and nothing else. Securing a classroom in this college is a problem until our three new buildings are completed, and one must fight tooth-and-nail, stab-in-the-back fashion in order to reserve one. We did get one.

Securing transportation was another major hurdle, as trying to locate people that are safe, dependable drivers, willing to give their time and use their personal vehicle on a regular basis for little more than break-even compensation are difficult to locate.

They do exist however, but this is a rare species. If you ever undertake such a program, be kind and generous to the people that provide your transportation. As in our case, transportation is provided for the students, and it must be reliable.

Contacting the past students and new prospects was usually met with acceptance. Most were eager to return, especially at the local college. Not only for the obvious advantages they gained from classroom instruction, but also, as one student described: "Now I'll really be going to school."

The resources for instructors was probably the least problem. The Randolph Public Library Extension Department, the Continuing Education Department at RTC and the Department of Human Resources all have offered instruction simultaneously. It has indeed been refreshing to realize

how many departments at this college, and other county agencies are willing to lend their talents and services for this type of program.

How the Program Operates

Since the beginning at the public library, we have met on Friday mornings from nine until Noon.

The first hour is always set aside for Braille instruction, both reading and writing. The enrollment is sixteen legally blind adults, (legally blind: a loss of 80 percent or more of vision), with four Braille instructors, and one aide. This makes the ratio better than four to one, a requisite for a subject as difficult as Braille. Two of the instructors are legally blind, and two are sighted. Perhaps needless to say, the two blind instructors teach intermediate and advanced Braille. Very few sighted people will ever learn Braille as well as a blind person. This sounds like a vast generalization, but it is true; as any one else working with the blind and Braille will testify.

When I began learning Braille, it was blindfolded. After several months of frustration, I discarded the blindfold, and like most sighted people teaching Braille, I cheat by looking as I read with my fingertips. Furthermore, this is the only way I can stay one step ahead of my eager students.

After a twenty minute break, during which the students must travel to the restrooms unaided as part of their independence training, the second session of instruction, Communication Awareness, begins.

Many subjects have been covered in this segment of the program. We first had drills in listening. Many records, tapes, and sound filmstrips are designed to develop one's listening abilities, and these commercially

produced products have worked well.

Identifying everyday occurrences by sound alone takes a great deal of training of one's hearing senses. Therefore, we developed more sophisticated tests and exercises as this aspect of the program developed.

Increasing vocabulary and the means for better general communication has been a major goal. Many of our students were easily intimidated by their own lack of communication abilities. Anyone in education realizes how important it is to develop this trait. I feel safe in stating that if nothing else has been accomplished, at least these people now know how to be recognized verbally.

In being encouraged to stand and address the entire class upon a subject that affects all of us, the students' verbosity now must occasionally be tempered with the instructor's help in concluding a statement. Most of the students are now comfortable speaking, or asking questions in most situations. In the early months, several would hide their faces when called upon to answer a question or share an idea. The rest were little better.

The study of the metric system, (that dread malady that affects all of us), was made more comprehensible by a large array of plastic and wooden models demonstrating the various specifics of the future change in measurement. Even now, I have to remind myself that the blind see by touch, and when given a physical object to examine, they really forget its purpose.

Rug hooking was an enjoyable segment that the entire class was reluctant to see end. Some moved faster than others, but all completed a rug in a shorter period than we had expected. The manual dexterity experience gained led several of the students to successfully attempt other

handcrafts on their own time.

Table etiquette for the blind was offered for six weeks before we progressed into the second segment of Nutrition in Daily Living.

I approached Nutrition in Daily Living with some trepidation, but it proved to be quite rewarding. Integrating the students in a kitchen situation seemed risky, but once again my own ignorance was erased by the students.

Most of the students are dependant upon very limited financial income, and a majority of them live alone. Therefore, they could not only prepare meals quite adequately, but several cultivate vegetable gardens and home can!

Therefore, instead of offering basic instruction in meal preparation, the chef, (borrowed from our Continuing Education Department), concentrated on economical shopping, the basic nutrients, and one person meals. He found they already knew a good deal of kitchen safety, and was able to expound the finer points of preparing a well balanced yet economical meal.

Each week, students were used to prepare a specific course of the meal that all shared. The instructor still feels he may have learned more than his students as he was continually amazed at their abilities in the kitchen.

Training in mobility for the visually impaired is presently being offered through the Division of Services for the Blind by sending an instructor from their regional office. This course should have been one of our first areas of study but mobility instructors are very hard to secure due to their very specialized training and high demand.

The numerous field trips we have taken are very painstakingly planned, due to the inherent problems of touring a group of blind people through a foreign environment. Without listing the numerous museums, industries and educational institutions we have seen, let it suffice to say we have never had any problems or accidents, due in part to careful planning. The students enjoy these trips a great deal. The trips are somewhat of a strain on our limited operating budget, but our local Lions Club has been most generous in providing lunch for the entire class on every excursion. This type of local support is very helpful.

Future Plans

As much enjoyment and education everyone has derived from the Blind Program, I am now at a crossroads in planning the future of the program. The core of the class have been together for two years, and they have made great strides in accomplishing the type of independence the program was designed for.

For the past few weeks I have been asking myself: "Now what?"

By organizing a meeting among everyone concerned on the administrative level, we have hopefully laid plans for the future development of the program based on the educational needs of the students concerned. But most importantly of all, this fulfills the wishes of the students themselves.

Shortly after discovering, (or rediscovering), the joys of new found knowledge and experience, the students continually requested more class time, more varied offerings, more materials, more of everything that was already pressing our resources to the limit. I hope that we have fulfilled this desire by planning to expand the program in the Fall

of 1979.

Continuing Education is a good department to have on your side. Their philosophy boils down to: "If you have twelve people interested in a subject, and if we can locate a qualified instructor, then we will offer it." My rendition is purposely simplistic, so do not take offense.

By having Continuing Education offer regular classes open to any interested adult in advanced Braille, rug hooking, crafts, home repair for the handicapped, mobility, etc., (and that etc. includes far too many to list), the visually impaired in the Blind program presently can enroll. Their first class may be composed mainly of their former classmates; in a Continuing Education advanced Braille class, for example. But as they gain even more confidence and momentum, they can enroll in classes not designed for the visually impaired specifically. If the the class would require some special tutoring in conjunction with the instructor, then the Division of Services for the Blind will offer support in the form of an aide.

The purpose, of course, is to mainstream and fully integrate the visually impaired into the Continuing Education curriculum. Indeed, to have some of our present students enroll in degree or certificate granting curricula is a goal that is certainly not unattainable.

The Blind program would remain unchanged, but with all new students for Fall, 1979. By spending twelve months in the present, almost segregated program, it is projected they will be prepared at the completion to take any course the college has to offer. (Or at least as much so as any entering student). The present program would act as an orientation and basic skills class for the purpose of instilling the confidence required to enroll in any program.

This may not work. Some of the students are limited. The general public still have the ignorant tendency to treat the blind as if they are totally helpless or repulsive; or both.

My personal goal is to see half of the present class enrolled in Continuing Education classes in the Fall and fifteen new faces in the Blind program. My goal is high, but this group of hard working, irrepressible people have not let me down yet.

Anyone that would like to visit and observe the program now in operation is welcome. Hardly a week passes that someone is not observing our classes. Also, there is available upon request a ten minute automatic color slide/sound program that gives an overview of the Blind program at Randolph Technical College.

We are unique only in that we have this type of program: Every other community college has the same resources.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

JUL 27 1979

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES